DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 089 450 EA 006 037

AUTHOR Loar, Robert L.
TITLE Curriculum Committees -- Can Students Be Involved?
PUB DATE 6 Feb 73
NOTE 4p.; Speech given before National Association of Secondary School Principals Annual Convention (57th, Dallas, Texas, February 2-7, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Activism; *Committees; *Curriculum; *Curriculum Development; *Decision Making; High Schools; Leadership; Skills; Speeches; *Student Participation; Student Role; Student School Relationship

ABSTRACT

Students can and should be involved in curriculum committees. Greater commitment to decisions is likely to result. The involvement process used in developing curriculum might be as important in assuring effectiveness of that curriculum as is the content itself, for learning is an active process. Moreover, the answer to most of the problems that face American education today can be found in developing positive, rather than negative, activity. (Author/WM)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 089450

NASSP Convention - Dallas, Texas

Feb 6 - 1973
9:30 - 11:30

Advance Text - Robert L. Loar, Principal
Los Alamos High School
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Topic - Curriculum Committees - Can Students Be Involved?

The topic which we are to discuss is "Curriculum Committees - Can Students Be Involved?"

I will state my initial response to the topic question as an emphatic yes. Students can and should be involved in curriculum committees. In fact, I feel that students, teachers, and parents should be involved in just about all major educational decisions. Now, let me hasten to add that I am not advocating the removal of professional educators from this process of decision making. Neither am I advocating the diminishment of the educator's role nor his importance in asserting direction. Nor am I saying that he may not be responsible for the final decision. I am saying that a much greater degree of skill is needed by the educational leader today than ever before in this involvement of students, staff, and parents.

It is entirely possible, in fact it is likely, that the strong and professionally competent administrator knows what the proper decision should be on almost any major issue. Further, it is likely that this same decision which that educator is sure is the proper one will be made after the involvement process is followed. So, one might conclude that a great saving of time could be gained, and therefore a greater efficiency effected, if the educator were simply to go ahead and make the decision in the first place. If, however, all groups (students, teachers, parents) are involved in the making of the decision, they are likely to be committed to that decision and to its results; hence, less complaint and fewer problems will arise in implementing the action necessary to achieve the fruits of that decision. This most important concept bears repeating: Those who are involved in making a decision are most likely to be committed to that decision. In the final analysis the processes followed may be as important in achieving desired results as the nature of the decision itself.

Now that my position in the matter of student involvement in educational processes is clear, I will attempt to develop further the rationale for that position and then offer some examples from our experiences at Los Alamos High School in involving students in the educational decision-making processes in general, and on curriculum committees in particular.

The traditional approach to education was a process almost totally directed from the top. The curriculum was most often a textbook which was followed religiously in an almost sterile classroom setting dominated by an authoritarian and omnipotent "teacher." The learner's role was to sit attentively while the teacher lectured, writing down the pearls of wisdom which fell from his lips, memorizing certain facts and figures deemed by that teacher to be important, then regurgitating those facts and figures at the appropriate time. That small percentage of students who stayed with this process for a designated period of time were said to be, quote, "educated."

EA 006 037

There is neither time nor reason here, today, to explore in depth those factors which forced a change from this "teacher centered" approach to learning to "learner centered" methods and curriculum. The students, themselves, have been one of the catalysts which have forced some of these changes upon us.

The school system and the school administrators who are not "with it" today in actively involving students in the processes of decision-making and in all manner of "relevent" educational experiences are not only short-changing those students, but they are apt to be at the head of the tide of student rebellion and of negatively oriented student activism.

The age old tradition of the teacher-student relationship, of the rigid methodology of lecture, recitation, term paper, and exercise in rote memorization--all of which narrow the concept of human learning, create conditions of unrest, spawn young people poorly equipped to originate or find satisfying roles in modern society, and which even encourage outright rebellion--these outmoded traditions must give way to a broader and more sensitive educational philosophy, one which promotes effective student participation in all processes relevant to them.

It is the administrator's role to provide the leadership and the educational climate which will allow and encourage both teachers and students to become involved in a constructive re-examination and development of their shared role in the educational process. Certainly the growing tendency of students to demand a more active voice in curriculum and in policy-making emphasizes this point.

I do not intend to infer that the teacher's role in the learning process is diminished in importance by this emphasis on student involvement. Actually, the teacher's role is of paramount importance. It is, however, a changed role from the traditional one of totally teacher-centered and totally teacher-directed experiences to one of involving students in all aspects of the learning model from input into the curriculum to joint teacher-student goal setting, of determining appropriate learning activities, and finally of evaluating the relevance and effectiveness of those experiences. The teacher's job (indeed, also true of the administrator's job) requires a greater degree of flexibility and more sophistication than ever before.

While the teacher's role is of great importance, what is not so readily recognized is that the pupil's role is also highly important. It is a well established principle of psychology that learning is an <u>active</u> process which does not occur without effort and participation on the part of the learner. No longer can we tolerate a system--or teachers within that system--who view the learner's role as sitting passively and having knowledge "poured in." There are observable classroom behaviors on the part of both students and teachers which allow identification of the quality of the learning and of the learning processes taking place. At Los Alamos High School the process of teacher supervision follows a pattern of observation related to these identifying behaviors, of teacher-principal conferences, of further observation, of self analysis, and finally, of evaluation. Let me emphasize that this process follows observable behaviors related to the roles of students and teachers in the learning process. Now, there is nothing new about the defining of roles of learners and teachers or about the observing of processes related to those roles. We have, nevertheless, somehow failed to place into practice some simple and readily recognized concepts related to those roles. Two of those important concepts are, and I repeat, (a) learning is an <u>active</u> process which

does not occur without effort and the active participation of the learner, and (b) those who are involved in making a decision are most likely to be committed to carrying that decision to successful utilization. These concepts foster the process of internalizing; and when we internalize, we believe and we act accordingly.

Thus, through involvement, students learn the processes; they become committed learners; their frustration levels decrease; and negative activism may reverse polarity and become positive.

The following examples of student involvement at Los Alamos High School reveal some of the diverse and stimulating possibilities. Parent and student surveys related to all aspects of school operation and school life were conducted and evaluated. Students conducted their own survey of the drug problem. Students functioned as members of S.D.E. committees on such matters as a state advisory board for Vocational Office Education. Student volunteers in certain classes met in after-school sessions with teachers to tally information from informal papers written by students on the goals and activities each had requested for certain studies. Student representatives served on such committees as discipline, dress code, the open-closed campus study groups, and the grade-credit study group. Students may be involved in the goal setting processes in classes and in units of instruction. In some classes students may write their own "learning packets." Students often report to the Board of Education on programs in which they are actively involved. One such example is a recent report to the Board by the "Students to Save Our Environment" Club. This group has initiated a successful county-wide recycling program and is currently engaged in a program--with the very able assistance of an excellent teacher who strongly subscribes to the philosophy of active student involvement--to get the total school and community involved in environmental awareness.

I could go on and on with examples of student-involvement activities at Los Alamos High School. Oh, yes! I almost forgot. We do have students involved in curriculum committees. And, that is what we are supposed to discuss here this morning. This involvement takes at least two directions at Los Alamos High School. (1) There are eight student members and four adults from the community who sit with teachers, counselors, and administrators to discuss the curriculum, and to survey students and parents for suggestions related to changes in current course offerings and/or additions to the curriculum. And, (2) Students have been placed on a paid basis on summer curriculum committees. These students are not charged with the responsibility of writing the curriculum. That is the job of professional educators. They do, however, contribute ideas from the students' point of view in brainstorming sessions; and they do write their ideas concerning appropriate goals, learning activities, and materials. Young people are especially useful in analyzing existing programs from the students' point of view. We have, in the Los Alamos system, employed for the past several years about 50% of our total teaching staff for six weeks in the summer to develop and revise curriculum and/or to teach in the summer programs.

Teachers, administrators, and students who have been engaged in curriculum committees which have included students, all agree that the students' contributions are valuable. And all have recommended that the process continue with student involvement. I interviewed all students who worked with curriculum committees last summer. Without exception, they each answered in the affirmative when I asked if they would again serve, this time without pay. We at Los Alamos High School feel that the only meaningful changes in the curriculum must come from the "grass roots," that is, from those who are effected--the teachers and the students. It is difficult, if not almost impossible, to impose such change without the active involvement of those two groups.

I long ago ceased to fear the matter of student activism. There is nothing wrong with student activism if it is positive rather than negative. The answer to most of the problems that face us in education today rests with getting students actively involved in a positive rather than in a negative fashion. Nor do I belong to the ranks of those who fear that we are abdicating our authority when students and parents become involved in the decision-making processes.

I have spent thirteen minutes talking about student involvement in the process of education, and I have spent only two minutes on the narrow topic of student involvement in curriculum committees which was to be our specific concern here this morning. I felt, however, that I could not do justice to that topic without first sketching, just briefly, a larger picture of the situation and without focusing on the rationale for student involvement. May I now restate briefly those important principles on which I have attempted to focus:

(1) Individuals who are involved in the making of a decision are likely to be committed to that decision.

(2) The process that is followed may be as important in achieving desired results from an important decision as the nature of the decision itself. Or, we might say that the involvement process used in developing curriculum might be as important in assuring effectiveness of that curriculum as is the content itself.

(3) Learning is an active process. It does not occur without effort and participation by the learner. The learner's role in this process has been defined, and student and teacher behaviors can be observed in relation to the quality of those behaviors.

(4) The answer to most of the problems that face American education today can be found in developing relevant student, quote, "activism," which of course, means a channeling into positive rather than negative activity.

(5) And, yes, students can and should be involved on curriculum committees. This activity is but one of the types of involvement which will help achieve the previously mentioned four conditions.

There is nothing new in what I have said here this morning. I have attempted to convince those of you who are not yet developing programs which allow the active involvement of students in all matters of serious concern to them that you should do so. I have tried to develop some rationale for this concept of student involvement, and I hope I have allayed some concerns relative to that involvement. My fifteen minutes have elapsed;--I yield to the next speaker.